

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 THE HAGUE 001454

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [MOPS](#) [MARR](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IZ](#) [NL](#)

SUBJECT: DUTCH CABINET APPROVES EXTENSION IN MULTINATIONAL FORCE FOR EIGHT MONTHS

REF: The Hague 969

1. Summary: On June 11, the Dutch cabinet decided to extend Dutch participation in the multinational Force in Iraq for eight months, i.e., until mid-March 2005, so that the Dutch troops in the Al Muthanna province can help secure stability during the transition period and the elections. As expected and reported, the cabinet announced that the troops will leave thereafter. According to Prime Minister Balkenende, adoption of UNSC resolution 1546 was crucial to the cabinet's decisionmaking, as were the requests from the Prime Minister of the Iraqi interim government, the UK, the UN and the U.S. The cabinet is well aware of the risks to which the troops are exposed, and has taken appropriate security measures. It nonetheless decided to extend given the mission's overriding significance. An ample majority of the parliament is expected to support the cabinet's decision. The parliament will debate it within the next two weeks. New troops are to leave shortly for Kuwait to acclimatize so that they can relieve the present troops by mid-July. End summary.

2. In a June 11 letter to parliament, the cabinet explained that it had chosen for an extension of eight months so that Dutch troops can continue to make a contribution to Iraq's stability until and after the elections in January 2005 and the formation of a new government. Together with the planned transfer of sovereignty on June 30, it viewed these elections as "a crucial step towards a safe, stable and democratic Iraq." It opined that "a safe and stable environment is essential to the political and economic reconstruction of Iraq, in particular with an eye to the transfer of sovereignty and holding elections so that the Iraqis can determine their own future in freedom."

3. Foreign Minister Bot noted that "in the past year we have been able to show that it is possible to establish stability, and we should now finish the job." After the elections and the formation of a government, it will be time to leave, he added. He did not anticipate that the Netherlands would be asked to find a country to take over from the Dutch in Al Muthanna.

4. Defying provocative questions inviting him to criticize U.S. policy, Bot countered that "the relative tranquility of the past weeks is the clearest evidence that we are on the right track." He said, "The picture is different now that the international community has spoken through a new UNSC resolution," which he said signified a major step forward. People in Iraq are seeing the end and are waiting to see what is going to happen. Bot referred to European pressure on the U.S. to accept a resolution that included some elements that were hard for the U.S. to accept. He himself had lobbied hard in past weeks for such a resolution. He was pleased with the ultimate text, which "met all of our wishes." With this resolution it had become easier for the cabinet to approve the extension.

5. Defense Minister Kamp acknowledged that the Dutch troops face a higher risk of being attacked in the run-up to the elections "but they are prepared for it." For their security the troops can continue to rely on assistance from Cougar and Apache helicopters, as well as observation and detection equipment. And in case of an emergency, they can request air support from the air forces of the multinational force. Apart from rising tension in the months preceding the elections, Kamp referred to the risk of Iraqi insurgents who might want to frustrate the reconstruction effort by turning against the Dutch troops.

6. Balkenende, Bot and Kamp expressed hope that the cabinet decision would be widely supported both in parliament and society, also for the sake of the Dutch troops in Iraq so that they know that an ample majority of the Dutch people supports their work. A majority of the coalition parties and several smaller opposition parties have already expressed support. Only the main opposition labor (PvdA) party is still dragging its feet. Although it has welcomed the new UNSC resolution as a major step in the right direction, it is still questioning the future role of the UN, the intended internationalization of the multinational force, as well as the degree to which the U.S. is prepared to step back in Iraq. PvdA is also concerned about the

security risks and is not yet convinced that the presence of Dutch troops will enhance stability.

17. Foreign Minister Bot warned that the PvdA should not ask for the impossible, such as the demand that Arab nations participate in the multinational force. That will not happen, Bot retorted but those countries are providing assistance to the reconstruction effort in other ways. Bot was confident, however, that the PvdA would ultimately consent to the proposed extension, if only because it would hurt its position with its voters if it did not. The cabinet actually went out of its way to keep the PvdA on board because wide support from all major parties is considered crucial to retain public support for the Dutch military involvement in Iraq.

MINIMIZED CONSIDERED
Sobel